



LOGGERHEADLINES

Sea Turtle News
from
South Carolina

January - May 1998

GREETINGS

Strandings

Strandings are up slightly for the first part of 1998, compared to last year (47 compared to 44). The first stranding occurred in March, followed by 13 strandings in April, and 33 in May. Three leatherbacks and one Kemp's were reported along with 43 loggerheads.

Concurrent openings of the South Carolina and Georgia shrimp season, reduced the number of shrimp boats in South Carolina waters on opening day. This could help loggerheads by spreading out the boats working along the coast and reducing the chance of multiple captures in nets. Last year, 407 boats were counted on opening day, compared to 289 this year.

On June 1st, an adult female loggerhead stranded on Seabrook Island. With help from Camp St. Christopher employees, we were able to take it off of the beach for a post-mortem. From her tag number, she was identified as a nesting female from Botany Bay Plantation that was part of a translocation study in 1989. During that study, she

was moved from the Botany beach and relocated to Hilton Head Island. Using a radio transmitter, she was followed until she emerged on Hilton Head to lay. The tracking equipment was removed at that time. In the last 9 years, she grew only 1 inch in length. During the post-mortem, 164 fully formed eggs were found in this turtle. There was a significant amount of hemorrhaging in her pectoral area, but we can only speculate about what caused this trauma.

Charlotte Hope has some recent evidence that sex cannot be accurately determined on small loggerheads. A post-mortem on a 38 1/2 inch curved carapace length loggerhead revealed the sex to be male. However, this turtle's tail did not extend beyond the carapace.

Several stranding procedure reminders:

- 1) Call the office to report fresh carcasses so that they can be retrieved for post-mortems.
- 2) Call in any strandings under 18 inches, curved carapace length.
- 3) Call in all strandings no later than the Monday morning following the stranding. National Marine Fisheries Service requests that each week's stranding data be reported by Monday afternoon.

Phone #: 843-762-5015.

- 4) Paint all carcasses, especially if they are not going to be buried.
- 5) Try to pull strandings above the high tide line so that they do not wash out and restrand.

Nesting

This season's first nest was found on Cape Island on May 12th. The 1998 season is already looking promising. Cape Island had 20 nests in one night. Last year, Cape didn't reach numbers this high until June. Hopefully, other beaches will see a rise from last year's low numbers.

1997 was the third summer in the three year cycle of the intensive aerial surveys. The next two years will have a less intensive schedule. This summer, plans call for only four flights scheduled for June 10th and 24th, and July 10th and 23rd.

Researchers on Blackbeard Island, Georgia encountered a Kemp's Ridley on June 5th. She did not nest and has not returned to the island. Ed Drane on Hilton Head reported two unusual false crawls. He believes they were made by a Kemp's Ridley. Kemp's tracks will be narrower and won't make marks as deep as those made by loggerheads. Pay attention to smaller sized crawls and any early morning nesters, since Kemp's usually nest in the daytime.



Other News

In February 1997, high seas caused a container ship to lose its cargo of LEGO toys off the coast of England. Researchers predict that they will begin washing up this summer and fall in the Carolinas and Florida. Oceanographer, Dr. Curtis Ebbesmeyer, is interested in where and when this flotsam will appear. If you come across any LEGOs this summer, he is requesting your name, address, the location of the find, a picture of the piece, and any anecdotes about the discovery. Ironically, the LEGO's lost at sea are life rafts, dive flippers, frying pans, and swords. Dr. Ebbesmeyer can be reached at 6306 21st Avenue, NE, Seattle, WA 98115. If you're on-line, you can read about his research at www.beachcombers.org.

Kimberly Wells, a recent graduate of the Academic Magnet School in Charleston, is undertaking a project to help reduce beachfront lighting on Folly Beach. She will work in conjunction with the volunteer turtle project to get signs posted on the roadway heading to the beach and light plate stickers in houses on the front beach. We look forward to the positive results of her efforts.

Sally Murphy, State Coordinator

Charlotte Hope, Meg Hoyle and Joan Drews

Equal opportunity agency